



# How and Why to Engage with Local Criminal Justice Planning Boards

A “how-to” guide for State Administering Agencies on engaging with local criminal justice planning boards

## The Importance of Engaging Local Systems and Partners

High-functioning criminal justice systems require the coordination and cooperation of multiple governmental and non-governmental partners at all levels, including federal, state, tribal, county and city. While high-level policy and funding decisions often occur at federal and state levels, the engagement of local systems and partners is crucial to ensuring that policies are enacted properly, and funding is directed to priority areas.

Local Criminal Justice Planning Boards, often referred to as **Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils (CJCC)**, vary widely in their structure and membership, but most often consist of leaders from many sectors of government and service who convene to discuss and steer the highest priority justice issues in their communities.

CJCCs are more likely to be created, and to succeed, when state government encourages local criminal justice planning, analysis and coordination. Many states, who are included in this thought piece, such as Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Virginia have established frameworks to support local criminal justice planning boards to incentivize system-wide planning and to further public safety and criminal justice goals.

## Byrne JAG Encourages Partnership and Engagement Between State and Local Partners

The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant program (**Byrne JAG**) is the nation’s cornerstone criminal justice program, spurring innovation and supporting evidence-based practices in crime control and prevention nationwide. State Administering Agencies, or **SAA**s, are the state designee responsible for the administration of Byrne JAG. Each state and territory has an SAA and the structure of these agencies can vary widely. However, SAAs use strategic planning and stakeholder input to guide their state’s criminal justice priorities and spending.

In the Justice for All Reauthorization Act of 2016, Congress added a statewide strategic planning requirement for Byrne JAG recipients. This requirement acknowledged the importance of local systems and partners engagement by including “**consultation with local governments, and representatives of all segments of the criminal justice system**, including judges, prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, corrections personnel, and providers of indigent defense services, victim services, juvenile justice delinquency prevention programs, community corrections, and reentry services” in the new mandate.

Coincidentally, the outlined stakeholders in the Justice for All Reauthorization Act include many, if not all, stakeholders typically included in a local criminal justice planning board.

## SAAs that Engage with Local Criminal Justice Planning Boards in Their States

As SAAs across the nation are looking for effective approaches to include diverse stakeholder groups into their planning processes, many have found tremendous success engaging their state’s local planning boards. This thought piece discusses four strong and supportive approaches to this engagement taken by four different states. Although each state took a very different approach, the benefits and takeaways from all four overwhelmingly support the engagement of these local planning boards for the betterment of the SAA and the state criminal justice system.

## Seven Top Takeaways

1

Local criminal justice planning boards serve as key partners in statewide criminal justice strategic planning. They are great sounding boards for feedback on potential new programs and policies.

2

Local criminal justice planning boards deliver higher quality programs and effective use of funding opportunities.

3

Local criminal justice planning boards allow for a “one-stop shop” for reaching several key stakeholders in a community, allowing for more consistent and efficient messaging and planning.

4

Local criminal justice planning boards offer a unified and equally represented voice of criminal justice needs for a community allowing them to serve as a panel of experts for the criminal justice needs in their own community.

5

Having strong relationships between the SAA and the local criminal justice planning boards allows the boards to learn from the SAA, and the SAA to learn from the local communities, improving the criminal justice system within the state.

6

Supporting local planning boards can look different from state to state and local jurisdiction to local jurisdiction.

7

There are various ways to provide support to local criminal justice planning boards, examples include funding for criminal justice planning board support staff, funding for innovative criminal justice programs, technical assistance for strategic planning and other training, and support for data integration and data sharing.

The engagement of local systems and partners is crucial to ensuring that policies are enacted properly, and funding is directed to priority areas.

### The Pennsylvania Approach

#### *Background*

In 1993, inspired by what they learned at a training on establishing Intermediate Punishment Boards, officials in Delaware County began the process of creating their own local planning board, which became Pennsylvania’s first official Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) in 1994.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) was an early supporter of CJABs and provided support to Delaware County and other counties looking to create a local planning board. Around 2006, the state was entering a recession and money was getting tight at all levels of government. The state decided then that it no longer wanted to fund in silos and recognized the importance of more collaboration and coordination at the local level. PCCD began to encourage CJABs throughout the state to organize and expand. PCCD convened a focus group of CJAB representatives to develop a set of minimum operating standards. They began to provide resources to enable every county to have a functional board, provided support in the form of training opportunities and contracted with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania to employ specialists in the Western, Central and Eastern regions of the state. This investment continues to pay off for the state and all counties now have operational CJABs.

## How

In Pennsylvania, all CJABs must adhere to a **minimum set of operating standards**. The standards exist as minimum requirements and CJABs are given immense latitude to structure the CJAB in a manner that suits the needs of the county. For instance, the standards lay out what representatives must be at the table, but counties can invite additional representatives as well. CJABs are required to meet quarterly but can meet more often if necessary. Agendas, minutes, voting and committees are mandatory, but do not have to follow a specific template. CJABs are required to create and maintain a strategic plan and include a reentry component and, while the standards provide examples, CJABs are free to create their own mission and roles.

This level of flexibility was intentional. "Pennsylvania has 67 counties and not all of them are the same. It is important to recognize the differences and meet counties where there are. Pennsylvania is a very diverse state with many different dynamics," notes Jackie Weaknecht, PCCD's Deputy Director of the Unit of Criminal Justice Improvements who leads the state's CJAB support efforts.

The state also recognized early on that they needed to encourage CJABs to become true collaborative planning boards. They did this by allocating a certain

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**PCCD Deputy Director  
Jackie Weaknecht**

amount of Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) dollars to support CJAB initiatives. The money could be used for a variety of purposes, including the hiring of CJAB coordinators. PCCD still creates opportunities for CJABs to access financial support. Today, PCCD continues to support technical assistance and training efforts through \$2,000 mini-grants that can be used as flexible dollars to support a part-time CJAB coordinator, training or strategic planning sessions.

The state hosts an annual CJAB conference to share best practices across the counties. It features panelists and a presentation of "CJAB awards" which recognizes their efforts across the criminal justice system. PCCD also provides technical assistance through the use of regional specialists. These specialists provide support to county CJABs and serve as a conduit for information from the counties to the state and vice versa. They also support the strategic planning process for county CJABS and work with PCCD staff to develop other training opportunities.

## Benefits

Pennsylvania sees CJABs as a "sign" for good government. [PCCD's website](#) lays out a host of benefits of CJABs. These include:

- Improved analysis of problems that will then result in better decisions;
- Increased communication, cooperation and coordination among police, courts, corrections and private service agencies, as well as between levels of government, and more effective allocation of resources;
- Higher quality programs and services based on a clear understanding of need;
- Expanded capacity and personnel skills;
- Consolidated effort to make the justice system more cost-efficient, more accountable and more open to the public; and
- Increased public confidence and involvement in the justice system.

CJABs are an important aspect of state priority planning. Deputy Director Weaknecht refers to the state using a “bottom up” versus “top down” approach to planning. That is, instead of the state dictating priorities to the counties, the counties can help to inform state priorities. Weaknecht notes the importance of building trust and rapport with the CJABs. They are the ears and eyes on the ground and an important resource for PCCD. The CJAB infrastructure provides a quick way for the state to coordinate with criminal justice stakeholders. For instance, when the state received Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funds (CESF) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it quickly circulated a survey to CJABs to determine needs. PCCD felt that having CJABs across the state already in place made the CESF process much easier, more effective and more efficient.

CJABs are also an important component of the state’s data coordination. In 2013, PCCD partnered with Penn State University to create [data dashboards](#). The dashboards track key criminal justice systems metrics including prison, court, probation and parole, and law enforcement indicators. CJABs help to populate the data with up-to-date information. The dashboards also help CJAB and PCCD make data-informed decisions.

## The Virginia Approach:

### Background

In 1995, Virginia began implementing sweeping changes to its criminal justice system. Discretionary parole was abolished, people sentenced to incarceration were required to serve at least 85 percent of sentences, “habitual offender” laws were expanded, and those sentenced to 12 months or less were required to remain under the supervision of local agencies. In order to provide alternatives to incarceration to those with short sentences, the state created local community-based probation agencies. Around the same time, pretrial services were expanding in the state and by 1995, there were 14. To encourage collaboration between local criminal justice stakeholders, Virginia Code 9.1-178 mandated the creation of Community Criminal Justice Boards (CCJB) in all jurisdictions with local community corrections and pretrial service agencies. To date, nearly all jurisdictions in Virginia are represented by a CCJB.

### How

The intent behind the CCJBs is for significant members of local government and the criminal



### Spotlight: Delaware County CJAB

Delaware County created Pennsylvania’s first CJAB and has been credited with assisting the PCCD with the creation and expansion of other boards throughout the state. The board has a long history and has made lasting changes in Delaware County. Just a few initiatives they are proud of include:

- Video conferencing to expedite judicial hearings
- Live scan digital fingerprinting and photo imaging available to all police departments in Delaware County
- CourtSmart technology in court of common pleas and magisterial district judge courts,
- Heroin Task Force
- Delaware County Cares Committee on Mental Health
- Prison Restoration of Competency Program (ROC)
- Community Restoration of Competency (CROC)
- Development of reentry counselors and forensic liaisons
- Expansion of specialty courts: drug treatment, mental health and veterans

justice system to meet regularly to develop and maintain local criminal justice services. There are certain elements of the CCJB that are written into statute. For instance, state code spells out that members must include the local judiciary, an attorney for the Commonwealth, the Chief Magistrate, the Sheriff, a local government official, an experienced criminal defense attorney, a Community Services Board representative and a local educator. According to the [statute](#), CCJBs must also:

- Advise on the development and operation of local pretrial services and community-based probation programs and services,
- Assist community agencies and organizations in establishing and modifying programs and services for people accused or convicted of crime, on the basis of an objective assessment of the community's needs and resources,
- Do all things necessary or convenient to carry out the responsibilities given in the authorizing legislation,
- Evaluate and monitor community programs, services and facilities to determine their impact on justice-involved individuals,
- Develop and amend criminal justice plans,
- Facilitate local involvement and flexibility in responding to the problem of crime and
- Review the submission of all criminal justice grants.

*“Many times, entities are already speaking and communication is already in place. It’s simply a matter of formalizing existing relationships.”*

DCJS Director  
Shannon Dion

While Virginia’s State Administering Agency (SAA), the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), does not provide formal oversight to the boards, they are available to provide technical support and financial resources. The DCJS previously used Byrne JAG funding to hire local planners to assist and support CCJBs. To date, one of approximately 15 hired planners remains. This planner is located in Charlottesville and plays a large role in data collection and management. In the past, DCJS has also provided a consultant to help CCJBs train and strengthen their boards.

Per statute, CCJBs are given a large amount of flexibility to use the board in a way that suits their community. “There is flexibility written into the statute,” says Shannon Dion, DCJS’s director. “The sky is the limit.” Examples of activities that CCJBs are involved in include: the establishment of specialty courts, approval of new jails, sponsorship of crime prevention videos, creation of task forces and policy and protocol development.

### *Benefits*

Boards are positioned to have positive impacts on local criminal justice systems through increasing communication among key criminal justice stakeholders in the community. These boards also provide a direct link from state, federal and other criminal justice entities to the communities.

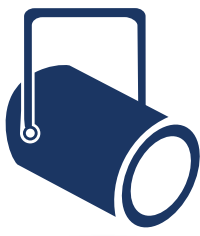
CCJBs are often used to solicit feedback regarding state initiatives. For instance, when the state was looking into ways to conduct pretrial assessments, CCJBs provided important and relevant feedback that helped shape the state’s assessment efforts. In 2010, Charlottesville and Albemarle County were selected by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) as one of seven national pilot sites for the implementation of an evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) framework to coordinate the work of all criminal justice agencies. The local CCJB is a resource to this effort and most CCJB members are part of the project’s Evidence-Based Policy Team.

Dion has advice for any SAA looking to support planning boards in their state. She recommends making sure the right people are at the table. Sometimes the use of a designee is unavoidable, but principals send the message that the CCJB is a priority. She also stresses the importance of communication and encouragement. It is important for the state to communicate the limits of legislation around the development of the planning board while also encouraging them to expand and innovate. The creation of local criminal planning boards does not have to be intimidating. If you are looking to start this process, finding a jurisdiction that has strong preexisting relationships is the perfect location to begin a local planning board. "Many times," Dion says, "entities are already speaking and communication is already in place. It's simply a matter of formalizing existing relationships."

## The Ohio Approach:

### *Background*

In Ohio, the creation of local criminal justice planning boards is not required by state statute. However, many jurisdictions have regional planning units (RPUs) to manage and allocate the funds that are awarded through Ohio's State Administering Agency (SAA), the Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS). RPUs help determine priority areas of funding and are often used as peer reviewers in the county grant allocation process. Many jurisdictions also establish themselves as metropolitan county criminal justice services agencies. Requirements for the establishment of this type of agency are laid out in statute. Pursuant to the statute, these agencies create a supervisory board made up of county officials and criminal justice stakeholders,



### **Spotlight: Thomas Jefferson Area Community Criminal Justice Board**

The Thomas Jefferson Area Community CCJB (covering Charlottesville, Albemarle, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Orange and Nelson counties) benefits from having the state's remaining criminal justice planner. The planner adds a needed element of data collection and analysis to the CCJB. With the help of the planner, the CCJB has been involved in a variety of important and innovative initiatives including

- A four-year jail population study (CY12-15) which identified the primary drivers of bed-day expenditures and cost.
- Collaboration with the University of Virginia Department of Systems Engineering to produce a first-ever study of the size and composition of the jail's inmate population suffering from serious mental illnesses. The study also matched jail data with client data from Region Ten Community Services to determine the number of mentally ill inmates that received mental health services following their release from jail.
- Through work with NIC and the EBDM Policy Team, the creation of a coordinated response to intimate partner violence, called the Blueprint for Safety, which seeks to enhance the safety of victims as they navigate the criminal justice system. All law enforcement officers in Charlottesville and Albemarle County are now using a Lethality Assessment Protocol to help determine the level of risk present at a domestic violence call, and to help the victim get linked to services including safe housing and counseling.

“There is a relationship where they learn from us and we learn from them. Many can benefit from the synergy and knowledge of coming together.”

OCJS Executive Director  
Karhlton Moore

create and implement county plans and review the needs of the overall criminal justice system.

Because there is no state mandate for the creation of a local criminal justice planning board, there is variation throughout the state. While some criminal justice planning boards and RPUs are the same body, others are not. Some have both, just one or neither. Additionally, some boards, such as Lucas County and Summit County, have been around for decades and function as an established board, while other jurisdictions are less formal. Regardless, OCJS finds value in engaging and supporting all counties in their criminal justice planning efforts.

### *How*

The structure of criminal justice planning boards is not formalized. However, OCJS often uses these boards to make funding decisions. The state sets aside a certain amount of funding for counties and OCJS requests local input in funding decisions. Jurisdictions are also required to submit a strategic plan.

Jurisdictions are aware of state priorities and counties undergo a peer review process using a scoring matrix. Local funding decisions are rarely overruled by the state. OCJS is also eager to help jurisdictions in any way they can. While OCJS does not provide

formal oversight over any criminal justice planning board, they are a funding partner and encourage innovation. Karhlton Moore, OCJS’s executive director, tries to attend all meetings and trainings offered by the boards. “The state wants to support all criminal justice planning efforts,” says Moore.

### *Benefits*

Moore outlines a variety of benefits of local criminal justice planning boards. For instance, turning to these boards is convenient when trying to implement statewide efforts. Ohio does not have a state police or a unified court system, so when the state needed help implementing a statewide electronic warrant system, they turned to the planning boards. The boards provided invaluable support to this effort. Local planning boards provide a point of contact for each jurisdiction. “Being able to attend a local planning board meeting and have the discussion with everyone that is needed at one time is a tremendous resource and is extremely helpful when trying to build consensus around a new statewide effort,” Moore explains.

He notes that the local insight is invaluable. “They understand their community in a way I never will and we rely on them to know the lay of the land,” he explained. OCJS can turn to these boards when they need answers quickly. For example, when the office received Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding, the boards provided a quick sounding board regarding priorities. Additionally, many counties, due to the nature of their smaller size, can move more quickly than the state.

RPUs and other local planning boards in Ohio also allow for more diversity in the way Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) funds are allocated. Having the RPUs serve as peer reviewers of Byrne JAG applications creates an environment of collaboration and accountability. Additionally, it allows for a more sustainable approach to program funding after the grants are no longer the main financial support of the program or project.

Moore also points to the symbiotic relationship between local planning boards and OCJS. "There is a relationship where they learn from us and we learn from them. Many can benefit from the synergy and knowledge of coming together," He said. Many of the boards are in touch with OCJS and let the office know when they want to try something new. It leads to a state that is always innovating.



### Spotlight: Lucas County CJCC

One of Ohio's more established criminal justice planning boards is the [Lucas County CJCC](#).

Officially established in 1981, the CJCC's board has 13 members and dedicated staff to help achieve their mission "to promote and foster cooperation, coordination, and cost-savings between governmental units and agencies, and to improve the criminal justice system through information services, technical assistance, analysis, grant development, research, and by providing regional services requested by the governmental units served." Lucas County was an early adopter of technology and data integration and provides and maintains an integrated criminal justice information system through the Northwest Ohio Regional Information System (NORIS). NORIS:

- Supports over 2,800 users on the NORIS network
- Processes 12 million transactions per month
- Maintains criminal histories on 700,000 people
- Offers online access to over 100,000, and
- Warehouses more than 100,000,000 automated criminal justice information records.

## The Oregon Approach:

### Background

In 1993, Benton County, Oregon wanted to take a closer look at their criminal justice planning. Inspired by the work of other jurisdictions around the nation, they created Oregon's first local Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. The [goals](#) were threefold: to promote and facilitate fair, efficient and coordinated criminal justice services; to provide long-range planning for delivering criminal justice services in the county; and to provide timely information about important criminal justice matters to government agencies and to the local public. Two years later, Oregon voters passed Measure 11 to increase prison time for violent crimes, sending more people to state prisons for a longer time. In an effort to lessen the burden on the state Department of Corrections (DOC) and to increase access to community-based corrections and treatment services in local jurisdictions, Senate Bill 1145 transferred responsibility for people incarcerated for felony offenses who were sentenced to less than one year from the state DOC to counties.

Due in part to Benton County's success, as part of the legislature's vision of an effective community corrections system, the bill also required every county in the state to establish a criminal justice planning board, known in Oregon as a Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) with the goals to (1) coordinate justice policies and operations among local governments, public safety agencies and community organizations, (2) collaborate in planning and developing improvements in the county's criminal and juvenile justice systems, and (3) reduce crime and recidivism in counties. According to then-Governor John Kitzhaber, "This partnership is based on three principles: local control, accountability, and crime prevention."

While LPSCCs across the state engage in a variety of activities to improve system-wide communication and collaboration, their primary purpose is to coordinate local criminal justice policy and planning



and make recommendations to the county board of commissioners regarding the use of state and county resources to supervise local justice-involved youth and adults. Beginning in 2014, Oregon's State Administering Agency (SAA), the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission (CJC), expanded the role of LPSCCs by requiring their involvement in all Justice Reinvestment grant applications, and in 2019 for all Specialty Court grant applications.

### *How*

Convened by their respective boards of county commissioners, state statute sets forth the required membership of LPSCCs composed of key local public safety stakeholders that must include: the police chief, sheriff, district attorney, state court judge, public defender, director of community corrections, county commissioner, juvenile department director, health director, a citizen, city council member or mayor, Oregon State Police representative and an Oregon Youth Authority representative. Statute requires the LPSCC in each county to develop and recommend a plan for use of state resources to serve the local justice-involved adult population and the needs of the local justice-involved youth population (those between 15 and 18 years old). Plans for youth must provide for coordination of community-wide services involving prevention, treatment, education, employment resources and intervention strategies. The plans also seek to maximize the effectiveness of limited community corrections funding through alternatives to incarceration.

LPSCCs are given the flexibility to create a council that meets the needs of the community. Some LPSCCs meet monthly while others meet quarterly. Some LPSCCs have the resources to hire dedicated staff and others do not. Previously, the state secured a Justice Reinvestment Maximization grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance that employed six LPSCC coordinators throughout the state that serviced 15 counties. These funds jump-started LPSCCs in these

The CJC uses information gathered from LPSCCs to better understand the criminal justice system, determine state priorities and inform how the CJC can improve its capacity to provide support to the LPSCCs.

jurisdictions and many of them have continued to fund these positions after grant funding expired because of the demonstrated value added to their counties. These coordinators provide administrative support to the LPSCCs in their regions and typically meet monthly to share challenges and successes amongst each other.

### *Benefits*

Ian Davidson, justice reinvestment manager at the CJC, oversees the state's LPSCC efforts. Having previously served as a LPSCC coordinator, he understands LPSCCs from multiple angles. Davidson points to the symbiotic relationship the CJC has with LPSCCs as a key benefit. The CJC has a direct link to counties which can directly impact priority setting and planning. Likewise, LPSCCs have a direct link to the CJC and find value in learning firsthand what is happening on a state level. LPSCCs are the first sounding board for ideas and priorities coming out of the state, and the requirement that LPSCCs participate in the review of grant funding emboldens them. The CJC uses information gathered from LPSCCs to gain a better understanding of the criminal justice system, determine state priorities and inform how the CJC can improve its capacity to provide support to the LPSCCs.

Davidson has a lot of advice for any SAA looking to support local planning. He sees the SAA's role as an important funding resource. He notes the



### Spotlight: Multnomah County LPSCC

Multnomah County is Oregon's largest county and home to Portland. Its LPSCC seeks to further criminal justice reform through facilitation, planning, project management, data analysis and community engagement. **The Multnomah County LPSCC** is a nationally recognized council that has successfully secured multiple sources of funding, including federal grants, and employs six full-time employees. The LPSCC participates in The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge, a nationwide initiative to reduce over-incarceration. Each year, the Multnomah LPSCC holds a "What Works in Public Safety" conference to bring together state and regional policymakers to provide them with information on best practices to guide their decision-making. Multnomah County's Justice Reinvestment efforts have led to a 40 percent reduction in the number of people sentenced to prison.

importance of supporting LPSCCs early on. It shows the state's commitment to LPSCCs while also encouraging the county to invest in the council.

Oregon is a geographically diverse state with many large rural jurisdictions. LPSCCs allow for one contact per jurisdiction and an easier and more effective feedback loop between the office of the SAA and the local criminal justice systems. Davidson also recommends having an open-door policy with LPSCCs. While it can be overwhelming at times, communicating this way with counties ultimately creates familiarity and relationships with everyone involved. Overall, Davidson says, LPSCCs are instrumental to the CJC's priority setting, resource allocation and planning.

## NCJA and Local Justice Engagement

NCJA can assist and support local and state engagement efforts in criminal justice planning and reform, whether driven by Byrne JAG funding or other sources. To create or increase engagement between state-level and local-level partners, NCJA recommends the following:

- Include local partners on state planning boards.
- Fund local justice initiatives to address public safety priorities (e.g., violent crime, justice reinvestment).
- Pilot statewide initiatives with local partners.
- Provide training and support for local justice agencies on evidence-based practices and implementation fidelity.
- Use state data and analytic capacity to support local planning (see example from [Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority](#)).
- Collaborate on information sharing and data systems.
- Convene local justice agencies for peer-to-peer learning.
- Facilitate focus groups and listening sessions to learn from local justice agencies on public safety issues and trends.
- Work collaboratively to address racial equity and fairness, community violence, [police reform](#), etc.
- Support and engage with local planning boards or Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils (CJCCs)

For more information or Technical Assistance Training on State and Local Justice Engagement please email [strategicplanning@NCJA.org](mailto:strategicplanning@NCJA.org).

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